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INFO RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS PRIORITY 0418  
RUEHJB/AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA PRIORITY 0514  
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RUEHKM/AMEMBASSY KAMPALA PRIORITY 2109  
RUEHKI/AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY 0663  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 0434  
RUEHNR/AMEMBASSY NAIROBI PRIORITY 1444  
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 0694  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 2043  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 0314  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 000172

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [RW](#)

SUBJECT: RWANDA DEFENCE FORCES TOP LEADERSHIP ON EASTERN CONGO

REF: A. KIGALI 163

[1](#)B. KIGALI 142

Classified By: CDA Cheryl Sim; reason 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Charge d, Affaires and Defense Attache met Rwanda Defence Forces, (RDF) Chief of Defence Staff General James Kabarebe, Army Chief of Staff General Charles Kayonga and Air Force Chief of Staff General Charles Muhire on March [1](#)18. Kabarebe expressed satisfaction with the recently concluded RDF-Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC) joint operations, asserting all Government of Rwanda (GOR) objectives had been met. Terming the FARDC's current operations in North Kivu as the continuation of Phase One of the joint military plan, he said consideration of Phase Two could only follow Phase One's completion. He was critical of what he termed MONUC's "failure" to assist the FARDC and protect civilian populations. When drawn out, he admitted the FARDC was not performing adequately, leaving local communities vulnerable to Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) reprisals. With regard to the eventual fate of National Congress for the Defense of the People (CNDP) leaders Bosco Ntaganda and Laurent Nkunda, the generals stated Bosco could end up in front of the International Criminal Court and Nkunda will likely be extradited in the future to the DRC. The purpose of meeting may have been to assuage any USG concern over recent reports of some FDLR reprisals in the eastern Congo and its attempts to regain lost territories; the broad strategic goals of the joint operation remain well in hand and continue to be met. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) RDF Chief of Defence Staff General Kabarebe requested Charge and Defense Attache meet with him on March 18 so he could provide an up-date to the Embassy on the situation in eastern Congo. Generals Kayonga and Muhire, the respective Army and Air Force Chiefs of Staff, also sat in on the nearly two-hour meeting that was surprisingly unhurried and relaxed for the normally pressed-for-time RDF top command. Kabarebe began by restating GOR satisfaction with the overall joint operation, indicating all GOR and RDF primary objectives had been met much more quickly than the planners had originally anticipated. The Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda's (FDLR) capacity to act was seriously degraded, the relationship between the FARDC and the RDF was rebuilt, and there was renewed confidence between the GOR and the Congolese government (GDRC) at the highest levels. He

asserted that DRC President Kabila's presence in eastern Congo showed that the security situation had improved to such a degree that Kabila felt more comfortable there than in Kinshasa. He also cited Kabila's travel by road from Kisangani to his farm as another indication of how well in hand the security situation had become.

¶3. (C) In contrast to reports that described Phase One of Operation Our Unity as completed (ref b), Kabarebe characterized the current FARDC operations against the FDLR as a continuation of Phase One. With Phase One still underway, albeit without RDF participation, Kabarebe said Phase Two in South Kivu would have to wait until the GDF and FARDC had the situation in North Kivu fully in hand. Kabarebe asserted that the integration of CNDP forces into the FARDC was "complete," adding the CNDP no longer existed as a separate military force. He remained largely unimpressed by MONUC's performance and highly critical of its "failure" to assist the FARDC to hold positions cleared of the FDLR during the joint operation, and its failure to protect the civilian population.

¶4. (C) According to Kayunga, over 600 combatants have now returned to Rwanda and another 150 had been killed during the joint operation. Separately, officials at Mutobo Demobilization Camp report 511 combatants had arrived as of March 20, with more on the way. Rigorous vetting prior to camp registration means these Mutobo Camp numbers lag behind other reported numbers. (Note: It is also likely that the FDLR suffered losses during the fighting last fall when it took up FARDC forward positions against the CNDP. Based on U.S. military doctrine, a ten percent loss of troop strength represents a significant suppression of a force's ability and a 20 percent loss equates to effective neutralization of the force. It is likely that the losses suffered in the fall when combined with the 750 killed or undergoing repatriation reaches or exceeds the ten percent level. End note.) Kabarebe stated the joint operation's primary military objective was to destroy FDLR's training and command facilities. The combined force went straight to the FDLR headquarter locations and occupied those areas. The speed with which this was achieved demoralized the FDLR and they fled.

¶5. (C) Despite their positive assessment of the joint operation, all three generals acknowledged that the FARDC had not performed well since the RDF's departure, leaving the population vulnerable to FDLR reprisals. They described the FARDC's serious logistic problems, including its inability to pay, let alone feed, its forces. Kabarebe stated that during the week following the RDF's official withdrawal, RDF helicopters had continued to provide support and supplies to the FARDC. Without RDF maintenance and communication support personnel on the ground, Kabarebe said he ended the helicopter sorties since the RDF could not afford to lose these assets. On the question of feeding the troops, all three said this problem went to the heart of the FARDC's difficulties with local communities. The FARDC's roadblocks and its taxing of local populations were the results of the forces not being paid. The lack of logistic support and provisioning resulted in the troops stealing food and threatening the local populations if they did not comply. In their assessment of FARDC capabilities, they agreed that the FARDC rank and file troops could perform if they had proper pay and training and if there was political will in Kinshasa to appoint capable leaders to senior FARDC positions.

¶6. (C) Charge raised the reports of FDLR reprisal killings, noting former President of Ireland and High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson had been in Kigali on March 15. In her briefing for the diplomatic corps and NGOs, Robinson described the population in North Kivu as "fearful" for its security. Robinson additionally expressed concern over the integration of the CNDP forces into the FARDC without proper vetting that allowed human rights abusers to "become the face of the FARDC" -- a reference to Bosco Ntaganda. All three generals were dismissive of Robinson's comments, noting that the security situation in North Kivu was much improved as a

result of the joint operation even if the FDLR still had the capacity to carry out reprisals. With regard to Bosco, none of the generals argued strongly on his behalf -- Muhire noted that it would not be surprising if the Congolese turned him over to the International Criminal Court. Finally, they confirmed that if the situation in North Kivu deteriorated and if President Kabila requested, they would be prepared to return.

17. (C) Turning back to the issue of CNDP integration, Charge noted there was credible reporting that forces loyal to Laurent Nkunda appeared to be resisting integration. Kabarebe insisted that Nkunda was no longer a factor and the integration of the CNDP into the FARDC was complete. He confirmed Nkunda (ref a) remained under house arrest in Gisenyi, but offered Nkunda would eventually be extradited to the DRC. He added that under the terms of the GDRC-GOR signed agreement that formed the basis of the joint military plan, both sides committed to removing any individuals who stood in the way of the joint operation; Nkunda was clearly in that category.

18. (C) On the question of President Kabila's domestic political problems, Kabarebe opined that Kabila had enough political support to withstand the challenge posed by DRC Speaker of the Parliament Vitale Kamerhe, who all three generals described as being deeply anti-Rwandan. Muhire, who seemed to be more conversant on political dynamics at play in the DRC than Kabarebe, acknowledged that Kamerhe posed a significant problem for Kabila. They also surmised that without any military support, Kamerhe had likely overplayed his hand and Kabila would deal with him in the Congolese fashion of buying off supporters.

19. (C) Comment. Kabarebe's interest in keeping us briefed on the situation in eastern Congo was welcome, although we believe that planning for Phase Two of the joint military plan is well-advanced on the RDF's part. The RDF top command is deeply appreciative of USG diplomatic and political support for the Congo operation and its peacekeepers (septel) in Darfur -- recently General Kayunga told Charge that the GOR/RDF should thank the USG more often for that support. The intent of the briefing appears to have been to reassure the USG that, despite recent reports of some FDLR reprisals in the eastern Congo and attempts to regain lost territories, the broad strategic goals of the joint operation remain well in hand and continue to be met. End comment.

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